DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 150 866 FL 009 266

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TITLE From Manipulation to Communication.
INSTITUTION Washington Association of Foreign Language Teachers, Pullman.
PUB DATE May 77
NOTE 13p.
JOURNAL CIT Forum; v9 n3 p8-18 May 1977

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Classroom Games; *Communicative Competence (Languages); *Language Instruction; *Learning Activities; Linguistic Competence; Listening Comprehension; Reading Comprehension; *Second Language Learning; *Speech Communication; Speech Skills; *Teaching Methods; Verbal Communication; Writing Skills

ABSTRACT

Besides lack of motivation and insufficient time allowed for foreign language study, one reason for the failure to develop communicative competence in second language students lies in the methodology. Until recently, most second language pedagogy has centered on linguistic competence, or knowledge of how to communicate in a language. Research in native language acquisition indicates that meaningful situational contexts and the need to communicate are necessary for learning to take place. Meaningful exercises designed to develop communicative skills in reading, listening, speaking, and writing include direction-following, interviewing, simulations, games, and monologue techniques. Varying degrees of structure must be provided for the student with limited linguistic competence. As far as error correction is concerned, it should be remembered that the aim in communication exercises is to get a message across, and that form is less important here than meaning. (AM)

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FROM MANIPULATION TO COMMUNICATION*

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Ever since the advent of audio-lingualism, objectives of modern foreign language instruction have included as a major goal the student's ability to communicate--to interact with speakers of the target language. Unfortunately, we have reached this goal only in rare instances. Why?

Language learning in itself does not appear to be difficult. Any physiologically normal person, even one of low intelligence, learns his mother tongue. Second language learning also does not seem to present overwhelming problems, at least if we judge by the approximately one half of the world's children who are functional bi-linguals. Why is it, then, that so few of the students who are formally taught a foreign language in our high school and college classrooms reach an acceptable level of proficiency?

Several contributing reasons could be listed for this failure. Among them are the lack of motivation and incentive for many Americans to learn another language, either because of the relative geographic isolation of the United States, or, for those Americans who do have contact with foreign nationals, the expectation that "everyone speaks English anyway."

Probably a major reason for our failure is the unrealistic expectation, indicated by our objectives, that a student will be able to communicate freely in the target lanaguage after only two years of language instruction (the duration of foreign language study for the majority of our students). In the writer's opinion, there is no way the average mortal in our classes will become bi-lingual in 360 periods of instruction (a good part of which is taken up with assembly programs, planning and collecting moneys for extra-curricular activities, and various other administrative details).

Apart from lack of motivation and insufficient time allowed for foreign language study, another reason for our failure to develop in our students at least a minimal communicative competence might lie in our methodology. Many foreign language teachers are familiar with the learner who can recite dialog lines, supply adjective endings, conjugate verbs in various tenses, etc., but is unable to utter a sensible sentence in a real-life situation. Only relatively recently has our professional literature indicated an awareness that a predominantly audio-lingual methodology which uses dialog memorization and pattern drilling as major instructional techniques might further the student's linguistic competence in the target language, but will not guarantee his communicative competence.

Before focusing on concrete activities to further the student's communicative competence, let us attempt an operational definition of the two concepts--linguistic competence and communicative competence--so that we may critically examine the suggested exercises to see whether they are congruent with our goal.

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Linguistic competence is the ability to construct phonetically and grammatically correct utterances and the ability to differentiate between correct and incorrect sentences. In other words, it is the knowledge about a language. The focus is on linguistic forms.

Communicative competence is the ability to understand and make oneself understood in real life situations. The focus is on meaning. Communication in real-life situations involves interaction and the sharing of experience.

Communicative competence is a complex concept because it implies not only knowledge of vocabulary, control of grammatical structures, and the ability to differentiate between sounds, but as Jakobovits[2] points out, it also means control of the implicit levels of meaning (determined by the situational context) and the implicative level of meaning (those linguistic or non-linguistic components of meaning which give us insights into the speaker as a person). In order to function on the latter two levels of meaning, the student needs to be aware of non-verbal communication, be it in paralinguistics (tone and voice qualities), kinesics (facial expressions, gestures, posture), or proxemics (body position in relation to others). Further, communicative competence, taken in its fullest sense, presupposes biculturalism, as both the speaker and the listener need to share certain knowledge and expectations of social rules, attitudes, etc.

The classroom teacher might be discouraged by this complex view of communicative competence. He might be tempted to throw up his hands in despair, wondering how all this can be taught in the traditional classroom setting. Again, let us not expect our students to become perfect bilinguals, biculturals, and communication specialists, but let us attempt to give them a conscious awareness of that intricate multi-faceted human phenomenon called language; and let us aim to develop in our students a realistic limited level (based on time and situational constraints) of competence in actually using the language to communicate--to share experience--in real life situations.

In addition to the linguistic objectives specifying what grammatical structures and vocabulary should be mastered in each instructional level, we need to establish a set of minimal communicative objectives which specify situations in which the student has to demonstrate his communicative survival skills. For instance, these situations might include obtaining food, housing, transportation, medical help, and police assistance; making friends; behaving appropriately in social situations, such as introductions, apologies, at meals, at birthdays, weddings, etc.; finding one's way in the foreign country; describing one's background; etc.

What can we do to aid our students in developing communicative competence?

Research in native language learning indicates two necessary conditions for furthering this ability:

1. Live, meaningful, situational contexts which permit or demand personal involvement and
2. The need (motivation) to interact with someone through language.

If we assume these conditions to apply also to foreign language learning, meaningfulness, motivation, and personal involvement become key words for communicative language practice in the classroom. The need for meaningfulness is obvious, because unless the student is able to attach meaning to what he says, hears, or sees, he is merely practicing noise-making rather than language. That motivation or need facilitates learning is also a truism.

The need for personal involvement is so aptly stated by Hoye who writes

> A student can be trained to repeat patterns, phrases, and words in a foreign language. He can be taught the structure

> and form of a language. But unless it all has personal meaning to him, he will not learn. Personal meaning is unique to each individual and is made up of involvement, experience, reflection, and discovery of the unknown.[3]

Paulston[4] has classified language exercises into manipulative, meaningful, and communicative. Illustration I attempts to explain the essential differences between the three types of exercises.

Examining current textbooks and other commercially available instructional materials, we find the emphasis (with rare exceptions) heavily on the manipulative aspects of language learning. For meaningful and communicative language practice the classroom teacher depends to a large extent on his own imagination and creativity. It is, of course, difficult to develop an extensive battery of exercises for the traditional classroom which would meet all criteria for communicative activities listed above. The usual classroom constraints make it impracticable to provide a large variety of real communicative situations. However, if the teacher keeps in mind the criteria of meaningfulness, motivation, and involvement, many types of activities can be conducted in theclassroom to further our goal.

It should be remembered that communicative competence is not just limited to the oral skills. While communication basically involves giving and obtaining information, this exchange need not be simultaneous. Many real-life communicative situations require just one language skill, e.g., reading instructions, listening to a radio program, leaving a spoken message with a telephone answering service, etc.

The following list presents some possible activities to develop communicative competence in a classroom setting. It is not particularly "innovative," nor is it intended as a complete inventory of strategies to develop communicative ability, but it should provide the teacher with a small repertoire of activities which lend themselves well to meaningful classroom interaction. Because of lack of space, some techniques cannot be described in detail. In those instances the reader is referred to a specific article in the bibliography for a full explanation and illustrative examples.

Meaningful Exercises for Listening Comprehension and/or Reading

1. Student reacts to true/false statements about persons, objects, events, visuals, etc.: e.g., Next Saturday there will be a football game at our school. (Note: the teacher should make certain that the item refers to a known referent in pupils' surroundings.)

2. Student follows directions or instructions:

   e.g., a. by drawing a line on a prescribed route on a map;
   b. by drawing a picture according to instructions or according to a description (e.g., You see a large house, four stories high. On the right of the house there is a big tree. Between the house and the tree stands the family car, etc.);
   c. by assembling cut-out objects on a flannel board or table according to directions;
   d. physically acting out commands given by the teacher

Illustration I

Classification of Classroom Exercises

MANIPULATIVE → MEANINGFUL → COMMUNICATIVE

MANIPULATIVE	MEANINGFUL	COMMUNICATIVE
purely manipulative; response predictable; understanding of meaning not essential for response; artificial classroom exercise: e.g. repeating dialog lines; reciting dialog; most types of pattern drills; cued question-answer drills; etc.	understanding of meaning essential for response; answer predictable: e.g. directed dialog; many types of question-answer exercises, where answer is known to interrogator (such as, "What day is it today?" or "What is the color of your dress?" type questions). etc.	understanding of meaning essential for response; answer unpredictable; new information conveyed; situational realism: e.g. interviewing exchange student; simulating a meal in a restaurant; free completion exercises (such as: If I were a teacher, I would ...); etc.

Artificial classroom exercise → could happen in real life

adapted from: Christina Bratt Paulston, "Structural Pattern Drills: A Classification," Foreign Language Annals 3 (1970): 187-93.

or a tape recorder (see audi-motor unit described by Kalivoda, Morain, and Elkins[5]).

3. Student listens to (or reads) a description of known people, objects, places, monuments, or events and guesses who or what is being talked about.

4. Values clarification strategies (described by Simon, Howe, and Kirschenbaum[6] and adapted to foreign language learning by Wilson and Wattenmaker[7]):

   e.g., multiple choice, matching, rank order of preference, and place-on-continuum exercises. These exercises can be easily personalized and give the student the opportunity to express a personal opinion with very limited linguistic ability.[8]

5. Don't forget routine classroom communications in the target language, such as greetings, roll call, routine instructions, compliments (praise), and reprimands ("give 'em hell" in the foreign language!).

Meaningful Exercises for Listening-Speaking Integrative Skills Use
(also applicable for skill-using activities for reading-writing and listening-writing)

Interaction Techniques

I. Uncued question-answer exercises:

   e.g., 1. Questions based on a dialog, a reading passage, a film, a picture, an object, or on the general surroundings,

   2. Personalized questions which elicit information (facts), opinion, reaction and/or feeling.

   3. Human Development Program (H.D.P.) exercises where students restate facts, opinions, and feelings uttered by their classmates in response to questions by the teacher or discussion leader (see examples in Wilson and Wattenmaker[9]).

II. Structured interview (simulated or real):

   e.g., 1. Student obtains specific information from a teacher, a foreign student, a visitor, or an immigrant from the target language country, fellow classmates, students from advanced language classes, "famous personalities" played by other students, etc.

   2. Student gives specific information to people listed in (1). (Note: Interviews can be conducted in class or outside of class, over the telephone or person to person. Paulston and Selekman describe an activity where students of Hebrew called native Israelis to obtain a specific task assignment.[10] If the number of available native speakers is limited, your advanced students might like to cooperate with your elementary classes.)

3. Students interact by using teacher-prepared conversation cards which guide the conversations by written suggestions of questions to be asked (see Bonin and Birckbichler[11] for specific examples).

4. Students interact using some realistic prop (e.g., a menu, an identification card, a class schedule, an application for a driver's license or a passport, a hotel registration card, a grocery list) which provides structure and realism to the conversation by suggesting a communicative setting in which the interaction occurs. For instance, students take parts of hotel keeper and traveler and go through the registration procedure. (see "self-directed dialog" activity described by Joiner.[12])

III. Simulations (role play):

e.g., greetings: introductions; asking or giving directions; invitations; making a date; ordering a meal; shopping in various stores for various items; business transactions at railroad station, bank; post office, etc.; emergencies at doctor's office, hospital, police department (e.g., reporting an accident, a stolen handbag, a lost passport); talking one's way out of trouble (e.g., a traffic ticket, tardiness, a forgotten assignment). For additional ideas see Disick[13] and Zelson.[14]

IV. Games:

1. Adaptions of popular television games, such as What's My Line?, Password (for advanced classes), You Don't Say, or Twenty Questions.

2. Any type of guessing game where students have to ask or answer questions to find the identity of a real or imaginary person, the name of an object, monument, animal, event, etc. (The games of Super Spy or Guilty Party described by Paulston and Selekman[15] are excellent examples. Joiner[16] gives examples of guessing games using numbers, expressions of time, colors, etc. for elementary classes.)

3. Advertising: Students present an advertisement of a product without actually naming the product. Other group members guess what is being advertised.

4. Whiz-Quizz: Student teams compete answering factual questions about the target language, culture, or civilization, current events, the local community, etc.

5. Mixer games, such as "Mais vous êtes ma femme" (But you are my wife ..., described in the Game Package of Voix et Visages de la France[17]): Each student is given a short written description of himself and an imaginary family member. The students have to ask other group members pertinent questions until they find the person

who matches the description they have in writing. That group of students which first assembles all the members of the imaginary family is the winner. Rather than looking for fictitious family members, students can be asked to find classmates who fit a specific description. Each student would write on an index card important personal information, e.g.,

> Who am I? I have two sisters and one brother, am the oldest child in the family, own a motorcycle, love to play tennis, and am planning to become a veterinarian.

These cards would be randomly selected by other students who have to ask questions until they find the person described.

6. The "Jigsaw Puzzle method" (described by Omaggio[18]): Each student in a group is given a piece of information (i.e., a word or a sentence). By combining their respective pieces in a logical order, students will solve the "puzzle" (e.g. complete a sentence or story, find the identity of a person or the name of an object, etc). The "Strip Story," a similar technique, is described by Gibson:[19] Students are each given a piece of paper with a short segment of a story or a dialog. After the students have memorized their "parts," they have to interact to arrange the segments in proper sequence to form a coherent story or conversation.

V. "Fusion of four skills" exercise series described by Elkins, Kalivoda, and Morain:[20] Four students in a group alternately read, tell, listen to, summarize in writing, and re-tell a story in the target language.

VI. There are, of course, discussion and debate activities which, if given sufficient structure and teacher input, can be utilized in more advanced classes.

Monologue Techniques

I. Reporting on specific topics, e.g., family background, school life (daily schedule, friends, favorite subjects, etc.), vacation, listing activities performed during certain time periods of day, listing steps involved in an activity (e.g., writing a letter, ordering a meal in a restaurant, baking a cake, etc.).

II. Summarizing or paraphrasing: Students summarize what they have heard others say in reports listed under item I, or what they have read.

III. Describing persons, live actors, pictures or a sequence of pictures (cartoons), objects or events.

A good adaptation of a description technique asks a student to describe a picture which he alone sees. The other members of his group have to replicate the picture according to the point-by-point description they hear.

e. g., I see a strange creature.

It has . . . .

Try it!

IV. Gouin series: A student orally describes actions he is simultaneously performing. Note: The props and settings utilized in an audio-motor unit (see Kalivoda, Morain, and Elkins[21]) can be re-used effectively for an active speaking exercise.

V. Show and tell: A student shows a photograph of family members, friends or places, a vacation memento, or something he has made and tells about the people or things pictured. For example, students can demonstrate how to cook a favorite recipe, how to fix a flat tire, how to make some craft item, how to play a game or sport, how to dance the polka, etc.

VI. Completion exercises, such as incomplete sentences:

e. g., If I were a teacher, I . . . .
The ideal husband is a man who . . . .
When I come home after school, I . . . .

Note: These completion exercises can be used as interaction activities by letting other members of the group restate or report what their classmates have said or written (see Wilson and Wattenmaker[22]).

VII. Libretto or narration writing: Students "invent" their own libretto or narration to accompany a silent film (show film without sound track), a filmstrip, or a series of slides or pictures. (Most schools have in their media library filmstrips or slides on the geography, history, arts, etc. of various countries which can be utilized for this purpose.) A variation of this technique would be a student-produced radio program (real or simulated) where students report on news, weather, and sports in the target language. (See Paulston and Selekman.[23])

A major dilemma in teaching communication skills in the foreign language classroom is that communicating, by definition, involves free response, limited only by the "natural" and logical constraints of the communicative situation. However, the student, especially in the beginning levels, needs structure and guidance on what to say (or write), because usually the student's mental maturity (what he wants to say)is so much more advanced than his linguistic maturity (what he can say) in the target language. Therefore, a major problem in devising exercises for communicative competence is to provide varying degrees of structure for the suggested activities to permit the student to successfully complete a communicative assignment within his limited linguistic competence. Structure can be provided by listing the points of information which should be obtained by the student in an interview; by specifying or suggesting what information could be included in a report; or

by outlining the approximate sequence of events in a role-playing activity.

Another important point to be considered when teaching for communicative competence is the question of error correction. How does one correct the "umpteen" mistakes the student invariably makes when given some freedom to express himself? How does one prevent the student from establishing incorrect speech habits?

First, it must be remembered that communication is not synonymous with error-free production of a language, native or foreign. The aim of communication exercises is to encourage the student to get his message across--to express himself freely in a real language situation. The teacher will defeat his purpose of he interrupts the student after each utterance with corrections. The student then becomes embarrassed, intimidated, and discouraged; his thought processes are interrupted; the communicative realism of the situation escapes, because the student feels that what he says has no importance anyway, that only the form is important.

There are those among the foreign language teaching profession who maintain with Lord Chesterfield that "knowing any language imperfectly is very little better than not knowing it at all." But maybe we need to consider Chuang Tsze who stated that "the raison d'être of language is an idea to be expressed. When the idea is expressed, the language may be ignored." When engaging in communicative practice, the teacher's tolerance for errors must be higher than during a pattern drill. This does not mean that linguistic errors become irrelevant. But the teacher must become selective in error correction. Like the mother of a young child would not overtly correct her son when he comes home in tears reporting that "Johnny hitted me," so must the foreign language teacher learn to listen for the message and concern himself mainly with those errors which can cause misunderstanding and interfere with communication. If your French student, while describing his family, says "Mon père est un professeur," do not wince and interrupt in horror with a patter drill! If the teacher does feel the need for correction he should do so indirectly, for instance by restatement (such as, "Ah, votre père est professeur?"), recuing, or suggesting some correct possibilities, if the student flounders in his search for a response.

It is hoped that the reader does not construe these comments as belittling the importance of correct language use. Linguistic correctness is intimately linked to communicative ability. However, insistence on error free language production should be during the presentation and drill phase of language instruction. Manipulative exercises have a definite place in the classroom to help the student develop a grammatical sensitivity for correct language patterns. However, such exercises are definitely skill getting activities (see Rivers[24]). If we view language as a means of communication, rather than exclusively a grammatical obstacle course, we must also provide skill using exercises, where the student can apply what he has learned in a real language situation, to see whether he is actually able to communicate--to share experience--with another person in the foreign language.

Notes

* Revised version of a keynote address to the First Joint Conference of the Washington and Oregon Associations of Foreign Language Teachers, Seattle, October 8, 1976.

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2. Leon A. Jakobovits, Foreign Language Learning--A Psycholinguistic Analysis of the Issues. Rowley, Mass." Newbury House Publishers, 1970.

3. Almon G. Hoye, "Flexibility--From Folly to Promise," pp. 29-33 in Lorraine A. Strasheim, ed., Foreign Language in a New Apprenticeship for Living. Bloomington, Ind.: The Indiana Language Program, 1971, p. 33.

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5. Theodore B. Kalivoda, Genelle Morain, and Robert Elkins, "The Audio-Motor Unit: A Listening Comprehension Strategy that Works," Foreign Language Annals 4 (1971), 392-400.

6. Sidney B. Simon, Leland W. Howe, and Howard Kirschenbaum, Values Clarification--A Handbook of Practical Strategies for Teachers and Students. New York: Hart Publishing Company, Inc., 1972.

7. Virginia Wilson and Beverly Wattenmaker, Real Communication in Foreign Language. Upper Jay, N.Y.: The Adirondack Mountain Humanistic Education Center, 1973.

   Similar publications exist with specific examples in French and Spanish. They are: Phillis Hersh Stoller, Joanne Tuskes Lock, Virginia Wilson, and Beverly Wattenmaker, Real Communication in French, and Virginia Wilson and Beverly Wattenmaker, Real Communication in Spanish, same publisher, 1974.

8. A large variety of such personalized communicative exercises are presented in three recent elementary readers in French, Spanish and German: Gilbert A. Jarvis, Therese M. Bonin, Donald E. Corbin, and Diane W. Birckbichler, Connaitre et se connaitre: A Basic French Reader. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1976; Patricia Boylan, Marty Knorre, John Lett, Aristobulo Pardo, and William Ratliff, Cara a cara: A Basic Spanish Reader, same publisher, 1977; and Renate A. Schulz, Roswitha Burkey, Ursula Vogel, and Michael Morris, Lesen, Lachen, Lernen: A Basic German Reader, same publisher, forthcoming.

9. Virginia Wilson and Beverly Wattenmaker, op. cit.

10. Christina Bratt Paulston and Howard R. Selekam, "Interaction Activities in the Foreign Language Classroom, or How to Grow a Tulip-Rose," Foreign Language Annals 9 (1976), 248-54.

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13. Renee S. Disick, "Developing Communication Skills through Small Group Techniques," American Foreign Language Teacher 3, ii (1972), 3-8.

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15. Christina Bratt Paulston and Howard R. Selekman, op. cit.

16. Elizabeth G. Joiner, "Keep Them Guessing," American Foreign Language Teacher 4, ii (Winter 1974), 16-18.

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19. Robert E. Gibson, "The Strip Story: A Catalyst for Communication," TESOL Quarterly 9, (June 1975), 149-54.

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21. Theodore B. Kalivoda, Genelle Morain, and Robert Elkins, op. cit.

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(This article will also appear in a forthcoming issue of Foreign Language Annals, from whose editorial board we received permission to print it in the Forum.
--the Editor)

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